



Office of Management's Monthly Newsletter

The Beacon

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Office of Management
Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

August 2001
Volume 5, Number 3
web: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm
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bea-con (bê' ken) *noun*

A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or

RON'S CORNER

The Beacon Expands into New Subject Areas

*By Ron Hicks, Deputy Administrator
Office of Management*

Last month we included 2 new sections in the Beacon, the "Health Corner" and "Communications". This month we've included another new section, "Focus on Technology". We've restructured our "Workforce of the Future" section in a way that ties the various initiatives that are related to the *FSIS-Next Steps* together, which you'll see in this month's edition, as well. Beginning next month, we will include a series of articles from the Planning Staff, on the Agency Plan.

It is our hope that you will find these new subject areas useful and helpful in improving the quality of your worklife with FSIS, and in providing you with important information about what's going on, both within and around the agency. As we expand, we will continue to be devoted to keeping the information in the Beacon as relevant and concise as possible.

As always, we welcome your feedback on the quality of this newsletter, and any ideas you may have on how we can improve the information we provide to you. Feel free to send your feedback and/or ideas to the e-mail box shown in the masthead, or directly to the editor of the Beacon, Peter Bridgeman.

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Initiatives Update August 2001

"FSIS-Next Steps" guides the Agency's strategies and activities for improving its performance and the performance of the regulated industry in the HACCP environment. The five interdependent areas are: (1) Agency Infrastructure, (2) Risk-Based Program Design, (3) Communications, (4) Workplace Environment, and (5) Training and Education. This report is also located on [Outlook/Public Folders/ Workforce of the Future/Information On](#)

FSIS-Next Steps: Infrastructure for an Effective and Diverse Regulatory Workforce

By the Workforce Management Transition Staff

Telephone: 202-720-3845

District Office Review

Current Status: Since July 16, the Draft District Office Review Report prepared by the Center for Organizational Excellence (COE) has been available on Outlook/Public Folders/Issues and Information/District Office Review. The District Office Work Group welcomes your comments and suggestions and has set up a hyper-link direct to COE for that purpose. Comments can also be emailed directly to jjohnson@center4oe.com. The 30-day comment period ends on August 17, 2001 when COE will sanitize, consolidate, and summarize all the comments, and include them as an appendix in the final version of the report.

An Agency decision about the District's roles, functions, staffing, and re-structuring is anticipated sometime in the fall 2001. Since the intention is to ensure that the Districts are properly equipped and supported so they can carry out our public health regulatory responsibilities, any decision will factor in the reports and findings of the Resource Management Coordination Team, the Enforcement Action Work Group, and any subsequent assessments.

Should that decision point to modifying the field structure, a proposed reorganization package, including an impact analysis, will be prepared and submitted to the Department for review and approval. This process can take up to six months to accomplish.

Resource Management Coordination Team (RMCT)

Current Status: The team is analyzing the "needs assessment" data collected from Field Operation site visits and preparing a draft report identifying current business practices, procedures, and processes. The draft report is slated for completion in the fall 2001. Once that is accomplished, the team will begin to focus on designing requisite business models for use in OFO's field offices based on selected "best-in-class" standards. One of the goals of the RMCT is to develop business models that can be applied agency-wide; therefore, an effort similar to the one conducted in OFO is scheduled to begin for the rest of the Agency's programs shortly after completing FO's business models.

Consumer Safety Inspectors, GS-1862

Current Status: A revised Directive outlining the new Recurring Vacancy System for Inspectors has been cleared. Applications for the new recurring system will be accepted starting in August 2001. Complete application materials are being mailed to all inspectors at their home address. The new recurring system should be "up and running" in October 2001 when the Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis will begin referring applicants to the District Office. For additional information on this initiative, see the article "The New and Improved Recurring Vacancy System" in the Human Resources section of this issue.

Food Inspector and VMO Recruitment Initiative

Current Status: FSIS' FY2001 inplant staffing goal is 7660. As of July 15th the inplant staffing levels were 7647. Considering the competitive job market, the HR Field Office is working closely with Field Operations and the individual districts to aggressively recruit well-qualified inspectors and VMO's. The agency is also experiencing difficulty in retaining VMO's.

FSIS-Next Steps:

Risk-Based Program Design and Effectiveness - Make the Best Use of Current and Future Resources

Announcement of Consumer Safety Officer Occupation, GS-696

Current Status: On July 16, over 3300 inspectors at GS-8 and above, and compliance officers at GS-11 and below, received a letter informing them of the establishment of 35 Consumer Safety Officer (CSO) positions along with instructions on how to apply, and a listing of where these positions will be located. The vacancy opened on Monday, July 23, and closes on Monday, August 20. It is important to remember that your application must be received in the Human Resources Field Office, Minneapolis by August 20th. Applications can be mailed (hard copies), faxed (612-370-2007), or emailed to HRFO. Since there are 35 separate vacancy announcements, please make sure you send your application to the "attention of" the individual named as the point of contact on the vacancy. You can get a copy of the announcement from Outlook/All Public Folders/Personnel/ Field Vacancies.

Once the selections are made, the CSO's will receive a combination of formal and OJT training to complement their basic and specialized education and experience. The formal training will be a 4-5 week program that will include such issues as regulatory requirements, administrative enforcement strategies, and scientific applications. Those individuals selected will need to be prepared to attend the formal training session October 1, 2001. If you have any questions you can call/email the appropriate staffing specialist in HRFO (800-370-3747) or the Workforce Transition Management Staff (202-720-4827).

Enforcement Action Workgroup

Current Status: The work group met for their second “face-to-face” meeting at College Station, Texas on July 10-12 and developed an interim report. That report is now available for review by agency employees on Outlook/ Public Folders/ OFO/ HRDS/ Enforcement Action Work Group. The final interim report is due by August 31, 2001.

Future Roles of Veterinary Medical Officers

Current Status: The three workgroups continue to move forward on the recommendations from the taskforce report, “*The Future of FSIS Veterinarians: Public Health Professionals For the 21st Century*”. The focus of the groups includes:

- Identifying factors that influence or involve modifying some activities or shifting current VMO functions to other FSIS employees.
- Looking at the agency’s efforts to improve food safety in animal production practices. These will be made through information sharing, education, and collaboration with representatives of producer groups, private veterinarians, State veterinarian, and others involved in food animal production.
- Coordinating the Taskforce’s recommendations on training and education with other agency initiatives in this area.
- Addressing information systems necessary for the changing role of the VMO.

The groups will also be designing pilot programs, which would provide opportunities for VMO’s to assume other public health responsibilities outside the plant. Oversight of this effort will be shifting to Dr. Bonnie Buntain, the agency’s Chief Veterinary Medical Officer, once she formally assumes this new position. As Executive Sponsor, she will champion the efforts of the team leaders, who will ensure implementation of the recommendations.

In-Distribution Inspection Project (IDI)

Current Status: The eleven IDI’s now on board continue their visits in firms that include retail warehouses, hotel restaurants, etc. IDI’s are also working with newly developed software, which is used to analyze and report the data that is gathered by the IDI’s on federal product in-distribution channels. The forms used by IDI’s are undergoing revision, which will allow the Agency to collect information on programs and controls that are in use in distribution firms. It will also provide additional information about federally inspected product in distribution channels. It is also important that the Agency continues to encourage and participate in cooperative partnerships with states where IDI’s perform analyses. For example, FSIS is currently working with the state of Michigan on this project.

HACCP-based Inspection Models Project (HIMP)

Current Status: There are currently 14 young chicken plants and 3 market hog plants actively participating in the models phase of the project. We anticipate a total of 20 broiler plants in the project within the next few months. In early fall 2001, 2 young turkey plants will also be entering the project. The General Accounting Office continues its review of the project, and hopes to have a report completed late fall 2001. Rule making for young chickens continues with an estimated publishing date of December 2001. A public meeting is being scheduled for late fall 2001.

In the June 2001 issue of *Journal of Food Protection*, RTI published an article, “*Traditional versus Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point-Based Inspection : Results from a Poultry Slaughter Project*”, which provided before and after results for 8 plants under HIMP. They stated: “The results suggest that inspection under the new models is equivalent and in some ways superior to that of traditional inspection.”

A Public Health Approach to Processing Inspection

Current Status: FSIS has initiated an open, public process to ensure that its regulatory approach for processed meat and poultry products, in terms of inspecting processing plants, focuses on the greatest risks. FSIS will continue to provide daily inspection in the approximately 5,000 U.S. meat, poultry and egg products processing plants. However, the Agency wants to change the manner in which it applies its resources, focusing more intensely on those operations posing the greatest risks.

The public meeting held in June 2001, began the dialogue on how best to strengthen the inspection of processed meat and poultry products in a regulatory public health framework. Through a series of future public meetings, FSIS will explore and discuss options for inspecting processed meat and poultry products to improve public health benefits. These meetings will

provide constituents with an opportunity to understand, analyze and participate in decision-making on options to improve processing inspection in a regulatory public health framework.

Since that June meeting, three work groups were formed and are continuing to meet and work throughout the summer toward the development of tools that will be scientifically sound, consistent with our regulatory strategy, and practical in the FSIS environment. For information on the type of work that the *Development of the Hazard Coefficient* group is doing please see the July issue of The Beacon.

The *Plant Performance Measures* group is defining the characteristics that reflect plant compliance with regulatory requirements for food safety and other consumer protections, and is identifying currently available plant performance measures and corresponding databases. The group has begun to develop both a working definition of plant performance and preliminary assumptions supporting the plant performance measure. It also has begun to identify meaningful data indicators to be used in developing a composite number reflecting plant performance (relative to other plants). The group will recommend practical systems for analyzing storing, using and reporting plant performance measure information. For example, data on plant performance could be used in determining allocation of sampling resources, identifying FSIS training needs, and identifying the technical assistance needs of very small plants. Over time, plant performance measurement could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of both industry practices and Agency activities.

The third group that is focusing on *Using the Tools* is identifying uses of the hazard coefficient and of the plant performance measures. The group believes that these are independent and mutually exclusive measures and could be useful as a tool in decision-making, although neither measure is designed to be used as a stand-alone variable for decision-making.

FSIS-Next Steps:

Improving the Workplace Environment for an Effective and Diverse Regulatory Workforce

Organizational Assessment Survey

Current Status: OPM is preparing the final report based on results from the agency-wide survey and the 17 small focus group sessions. Until that report is available, employees can review the responses to the all-employee survey, which OPM has posted on their website. Please check last month's article in The Beacon, "OAS Survey Results-Want to See More?" for directions on accessing this information.

Dialogue Sessions (formerly Listening Sessions)

Current Status: In July 2001, the team working on improving the listening sessions, submitted their draft report to Ron Hicks. On July 13th the draft report was sent out for comment to the Deputy Administrators, Associates Deputy Administrators and Staff Directors. Some of the key points the report focused on included:

- Changing the name from listening sessions to Dialogue Sessions. This change in title, reflects a more accurate definition of the process where managers and employees can share information and concerns in a genuine "give and take" forum.
- Establishing the Dialogue Sessions as an Agency communication tool.
- Options for assigning the function more formally to one organizational unit. This permanent assignment will make the Dialogue Sessions more visible and tie it more closely with other related activities.
- Procedures and guidelines for planning and conducting dialogue sessions

Within the next few months, Dialogue Sessions are planned for the Washington, D.C. area. Please contact the Workforce Transition Management Staff for information.

Workplace Violence Prevention (WPVP) Task Force

Current Status: The agency report is posted on the FSIS website, www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/topics/memorial.htm. In addition to the WPVP report, the agency has also worked with the Milbank Memorial Fund in addressing issues of conflict and violence in the food safety workplace. Their report will be an attachment to FSIS's Annual Internal Report, which is currently in the clearance process.

FSIS- Next Steps:

Educating and Training a Diverse Regulatory Workforce

Training and Education Committee (TEC) for 2001 and Beyond

Current Status: The TEC 2001 Committee is developing two comprehensive reports: *TEC-FSIS* covers current agency training, education and outreach activities, and is intended as an internal decision-making document. The *TEC Tomorrow-FSIS and Stakeholders* report identifies FSIS's training and education needs for the future. Its primary focus is outreach and partnership activities with stakeholder groups. This report will be widely distributed within the Agency and to stakeholders outside the agency who contributed to its content. The TEC-FSIS report was presented to Mr. Billy in July, and the TEC Tomorrow report is slated for completion shortly.

FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY

Finding What You Need on the FSIS Web Site

By Linda Eckrich, FSIS Webmaster

Telephone: 202-720-9892

Did you know the FSIS Web site now has about 12,000 pages? This includes nearly 7,000 text pages, along with graphics and downloadable files in a variety of formats. So how do you find just what you need?

This year, the FSIS Web Management Team began a long-term effort to evaluate the overall design and organization of the site. As first steps, we have added some new features, and we've made some behind-the-scenes improvements that should help you obtain better search results. This article presents some tips to help you quickly locate that important document.

FSIS Home Page

First, here's a quick review of the structure of the *Home Page* (the front or start page), located at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>. There is a method to its madness! The page is organized in two columns. The *left side* of the page houses high priority items, as defined by FSIS or the Department. This includes items required on all government Web sites, like the Privacy and Security Policy.

The *right side* of the page contains a description of, and links to, the site's major entry points. These links are repeated without the text descriptions at the bottom of the page, so pressing [CTRL] [END] is a quick keyboard shortcut for those already familiar with the site—no scrolling needed!

Navigation Tips.

Now, here are seven tips for navigating beyond the Home Page.

1. *Ask, "What's New?"* The "What's New" page showcases recent additions to the site. This page now has a sidebar that tells you at a glance when new items have been added to nine key pages: *Federal Register* Publications, *FSIS Constituent Update* and Constituent Alerts, the Library of Export Requirements, News Releases, the Recall Information Center, Speeches, the list of Accredited Laboratories, the U.S. Codex Office "What's New" page, and the OPPDE "What's New" page. [The "What's New" page is an attachment to each week's Thursday Report.]
2. *Browse By Subject.* To help you locate frequently used items faster, we have added a "Browse By Subject" page to the Web site. This A-to-Z listing covers a wide range of topics and includes our frequently requested items. You can get to this page from the Home Page or the Search page. The Browse By Subject page is updated periodically based on feedback from our users. Suggestions are welcome.
3. *Order from the "Drop-Down" Menus.* The left side of the FSIS Home Page sports two "drop-down" menus. The first is called "Featured Topics" and points to frequently requested or time-sensitive information. The second drop-down list allows you to reach any of the 17 program area sub-pages directly from the Home Page. Simply choose your destination and press "Go."

- Note that the regular text hyperlink to the sub-page menu has been retained, to keep this feature accessible to anyone using a browser that does not support the use of JavaScript. Either method will get you to the desired spot.
 - The [D] link beside the Featured Topics also points to a text alternative, again to assist users with older browsers or those who may be using assistive technologies—such as screen readers for the blind—to browse the site. New accessibility standards, effective June 21, 2001, require Web sites to be friendlier toward these assistive technologies for the disabled.
4. *Send the Search Party.* If you can't quickly find what you need by using the "What's New" option, the "Browse by Subject" choice, or the "Drop-Down Menu," you may want to conduct a search. There are two links to the Search engine on the FSIS Home Page, one in the top left corner and one on the lower right side. A search is often the quickest way to find a document, especially if you are searching on a word or phrase that probably does not appear in a large number of documents. If you have never tried the Search feature, you may be surprised how easy it is to use. Simply enter a key word or phrase and click the "Go" button. Or, check the box that says "Free-Text Query" and type a question in plain language, for example, "How do I use a food thermometer correctly?" When you visit the Search page, click "Tips for Searching" first, and look at examples of query language that will help you narrow your search.
5. *Turn "Lost" to "Found."* To quickly search the current Web page for a particular word, click "Edit" and then "Find" on the browser menu (at the top of your screen). Or, press [CTRL] [F] on your keyboard. The FSIS Home Page includes full text descriptions of each of the major areas of the site, so if you're not sure whether to explore "News & Information" or "Mission & Activities," try using "Find."
6. *Play Favorites!* If you use a particular index or menu page often, add it to your Favorites list for easy retrieval.
7. *A final tip*--the USDA symbol on the FSIS home page is a link to the USDA home page.

Do you have a suggestion for making the FSIS Web site more user-friendly? Are you interested in joining the Web Management Team (and your supervisor approves)? Would you like more information about the FSIS Web site? Contact Linda Eckrich, FSIS Webmaster, at (202) 720-9892, or by e-mail: (Linda Eckrich on Outlook or Linda.Eckrich@usda.gov.)

Additional Internet Sites Accessible to FAIM Users.

FAIM recently announced Windows Menu and Applications Update 17, which includes a Start menu shortcut to simplify access to the Internet sites available to all FAIM participants. After downloading Update 17, FAIM participants can go to Start, FSIS Applications, Internet, and click Additional Internet Sites to access web sites listed under the following groups:

- USDA Specific Sites (Examples include USDA, FSIS, and NAL)
- Other Government Sites (Examples include CDC, EPA, and GSA)
- Food-related Sites (Examples include MeatNews and Just-Food)
- Other Resources (Examples include Federal Express and MapQuest)

The list of available Internet sites will be periodically updated by the FAIM Division. Requests for adding specific sites should be e-mailed to Peter Kuhmerker, Director of the FAIM Division.

See Attachment 2 for the current list of additional internet sites.

HEALTH CORNER

Energize Yourself!

*By Natalie E. Illum,
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Human Resources Division
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Whether you are located in an office environment, a laboratory or plant environment, taking a break for lunch, to eat and energize yourself, is important. Why is it important to brave the "outside world" during your lunch break? Experts say that a

short break outside of your everyday work environment combats mental fatigue and relieves stress (even a different area at your work location or plant). During lunch, experts tell us to walk if we can, even for a short time, and to walk with purpose: be conscious of our breathing, take deep cleansing breaths, be aware of the way we carry our bodies; oxygen is energizing in and of itself. Any amount of exercise helps restore positive endorphins to the body, which can in turn, alleviate physical and mental fatigue.

Too often we are so fixated on our work tasks (or thinking about that favorite lunchtime meal) that we may not concern ourselves with the body's need to re-energize itself, by some form of exercise or other means. Our blood circulation, along with the way we sit or stand, can affect how we feel. These things can negatively effect our bodies and the quality of our work. Even if some of us have to maintain the same position for a long time, either at a desk or on the line, there are still ways you can improve your circulation. Stomp your feet a little to stimulate blood flow. Also, if you do a lot of typing or reaching during the workday, here are some basic stretches, from one approach to exercise, the Montgomery Method, to help keep you energized during the work day. (For more information on the benefits of the Montgomery Method, see their website at www.sportstouch.com.) The USDA TARGET Center, if you are located in Washington, DC, also has handouts on the Montgomery Method, or you can check for more information on the Target Center's website at www.usda.gov/oo/target.htm. As always, you should check with your health care professional before adding to your health care routine.

Here are some self-care exercises that you can do on a quick break or at lunch. They can leave you revitalized, stimulating blood flow and oxygen to the brain, as well as lower your risk for injury:

- Neck Massage: While seated, with your shoulders relaxed and down, gently massage your neck vertebrae with your fingers up to the base of the skull, while applying slight pressure. Do this for approximately one minute.
- Forward Arm Extension: While supporting your elbow with the palm of the opposite hand, gently extend your forearm outward. Repeat three times on each arm.
- Wrist Stretch: Gently shake arms out while seated or standing. Use opposite hand to pull the hand being worked on. Gently pull the hand up on each arm towards the elbow. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat on each wrist.
- Finger Pull: This exercise helps to restore energy in the finger joints. Gentle grasp each finger at the base off the joint and pull slowly. Do not snap. Once is enough.
- Upper Back Stretch: You may do this seated or standing. Clasp hands together and extend in front of you at chest level. Inhale and exhale slowly while rolling shoulders forward and gradually bending at waist. Hold for five seconds while breathing deeply, release hands and roll shoulders back and down to an upright position.

These exercises, if you choose to do them, can be completed in under 5 minutes and provide the perfect transition between a relaxing lunch break and a more productive afternoon. Whether you are able to walk to the parking lot, do these exercises, catch an exhibit or just take some time to catch your breath, make sure you take a break to reenergize and nurture yourself.

Virtual Health: It's Easy

By Natalie Illum, PERB, HRD

Finding the time to take care of "us" isn't always easy, but finding information on preventative healthcare is, thanks to the Internet. Preventative health care is a means for otherwise healthy individuals to help prevent disease or illness, identify the risk factors for disease or illness, and discover the most strategic approach for treatment with their health care professional. There are a variety of responsible resources available on the web that provide information on prevention and wellness, nutrition, and disease prevention and control. Many of you may already have some favorites of your own.

Here are a few websites you may want to check out. A healthier lifestyle may be just a click away!

- www.eatright.org : The American Dietetic Association homepage has a "Knowledge Center" for better health nutrition and a "Healthy Lifestyle" section that archives Daily Nutrition Tips, including such topics as "Muscle Myths," "Low-fat Barbecue," and "Office Parties with a Healthy Twist."
- www.youfirst.com : This website allows individuals to create personal and confidential health reports, free. It uses a reader-friendly survey to analyze your health and then lists actions you can take to avoid health problems and improve and protect your current health. It also provides background information on common health conditions and screening procedures. The process only takes about 10 minutes and can be updated at anytime based on your current health status.

- www.healthfinder.gov : This website includes a health library on wellness and prevention, plus a selection of medical journals and dictionaries to keep up on health treatments and medical technologies. The website is organized to provide health care information to children, senior citizens, parents, caregivers, etc. It is also available in a variety of languages so that everyone may have access to carefully selected information on healthy living from government agencies, not-for profit agencies and universities.

Of course, these sources do not replace the advice of a professional health care specialist. They are just examples of the wealth of health information available electronically. It is always a good idea to check with your health professional if you want to verify information presented here or elsewhere on the web, particularly as it relates to your own health. However, the Internet does give you the ability to research the health issues that are important to you. If you choose, the Internet makes it easy to get you started on a healthier lifestyle, one proactive click at a time!

HUMAN RESOURCES

The New and Improved Recurring Vacancy System

By the Human Resources Field Office (HRFO)

Telephone: 1-800-370-3747

A new Recurring System has been established for Consumer Safety Inspector, GS-1862, SJ-517's, SJ-518's, and SJ-519's; Egg Product Inspectors, GS-1863, SJ-508's and SJ-509's; and Import Inspectors, GS-1863, SJ-33 positions. Basically, this new system will operate very similar to the old system.

- It will enable you to apply one time, for a specific position, and have that application on file for up to five years. A copy of your current performance rating of record or a written request to the HRFO to continue your eligibility must be submitted each year by July 1 (for last names beginning A-L) or October 1 (for last names beginning M-Z).
- You will list your areas of consideration by City and State, County and State, or Statewide. We will no longer accept Region, Zone and Subzone requests.
- The cut-off dates will remain in effect; you must have your application in the HRFO by the 1st of the month to be paneled that month. Any applications received after the 1st of the month will be held until the following month's panel.
- Every application will be reviewed by the panel and assigned a score.
- You may amend your application at any time (using Form 4335-6), to include additional education, awards, or training.
- You may only update or replace your application annually to include additional work experience.

How do I apply to the new system?

- Determine which position(s) you will be applying for under the new system, (e.g., which grade level and/or SJ in the 1862 series, egg products, and/or import positions).
- Address the appropriate elements. (The job elements will be published in the revised Directive 4335.6; they were also included with a memo recently mailed to bargaining unit inspectors).
- Attach a copy of your most current performance rating, if you have one.
- Determine the geographic areas for which you wish to be considered, listing them by city, county and state, or statewide.
- Write your social security number on the upper right hand corner of all pages of your application.
- Do not include identifying information, (e.g., your name, establishment number, supervisor's name) in your element responses.
- Submit your packet to the HRFO for processing.

Questions may be directed to the HRFO Systems Team at 1-800-370-3747.

Creditable Service For Retirement

Deposit service occurs when your first appointment is on a temporary basis; that is, no retirement deductions are taken. Redeposit service occurs when you worked for the Government in a retirement-covered position, but then left and drew out those contributions. If you return to Government service, you owe a redeposit for that time. October 1, 1982, is a date with major impact on deposit and redeposit. Rules which were more generous for deposit and redeposit service prior to that date

became much stricter after that date, particularly in terms of service creditability and applicable interest rates. In addition, totally different rules apply to the new FERS Program.

If you have service which falls into the deposit/redeposit realm, you may wish to contact your Servicing Personnel Office (SPO) for more information, you may want to contact HRFO, Benefits and Workers Compensation, at 612-370-2000 or Toll Free 1-800-370-3747.

Requests For Employment Verification

The Work Number for Everyone provides automated employment verification to assist employees in securing a loan, renting an apartment, etc. This service has security features, which ensure that information will be released only to those who have proper authorization. Each employee is responsible for authorizing the release of his or her employment and salary information.

The credit and reference verifiers must receive an authorization code from you to access your information. To obtain an authorization code call 1-800-EMP-AUTH (1-800-367-2884) (*do not give this number to verifiers.*) You can have a maximum of three codes active at any one time. Each code can be used one time. Unused codes remain active for 6 months.

Access is controlled using a Personal Identification Number (PIN). The PIN number for USDA employees is the four-digit number signifying your month and day of birth (e.g., if your birthday is September 24, your PIN is 0924). The use of this PIN, combined with your social security number and the USDA Employer Code, 10284, gives you control over who can obtain your employment and salary information.

To access your employment information, the verifier should call 1-900-555-WORK (1-900-555-9675). They will need your authorization code, USDA's company code (10284) and your social security number.

The service is available 7 days a week during the following hours:

7:00 a.m. until 12:00 midnight (EST)
6:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. (CST)
5:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. (MT)
4:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. (PT)

As mentioned in an article on Employment Verification last month, the Human Resources Field Office (HRFO) in Minneapolis, MN and the Classification and Staffing Services Branch in Washington, DC are also available to respond to written and verbal requests for employment verification. These requests are completed based on information from the employee's official record. To expedite processing of these requests, employees should furnish the following address to requestors:

For Field Employees:

USDA, FSIS, OM, HRD
Human Resources Field Office
Butler Square West, 4th Floor
100 North Sixth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403

For Headquarters Employees:

USDA,FSIS,OM,HRD, Classification and Staffing Services Branch
Room 3141 South Building
14th and Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Note to Intermittent employees: If you are placed in a position of collecting unemployment due to exceeding the hourly limitation on your appointment, please submit your request for employment verification to James E. Frick, Inc., P.O. Box 66945, St. Louis, MO 63133. Their toll free number is 1-800-366-6660.

SUPPLIES**Attention: Field Supply Center Customers**

By Pete Bridgeman, Property Management Branch, ASD

Telephone: 301-504-4222

Things appear to be running smoothly again at the Field Supply Center - new orders coming in are being filled in a timely manner, and all systems now seem to be operating efficiently in the new facility. Final preparations are now being made to bring electronic ordering on line for our field customers. The revised supply catalog is on its way to the NJC for review, and will hopefully be ready to distribute later this month. The new catalog will include instructions for electronic ordering.

A number of our customers have been calling with questions about items in an IBMilwaukee catalog that has been included in supply orders shipped out during the past month from FSC. Please disregard this catalog. It was included in our orders in error. It is not an addendum to our catalog, and the items shown in this catalog are not available from the FSC. This was intended for customers who order office type supplies with credit cards, and was merely advertising items that are available from a *JWOD Industries for the Blind* company. It will not be included in any other FSIS orders from the Field Supply Center. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

Export Stamps

We are continuing in our effort to develop an improved, more durable stamp for exports. A decision was made recently to change the stamp design to use only 6 numbering bands, instead of 7. Since all of the certificates for export now use only 6-digit numbers, 7 bands were no longer necessary. This in itself should help improve the design of the stamp.

While the new stamp is in the design phase, we have had to stock some Superior Stamps in the FSC until the new stamps become available. We are ordering smaller quantities of these, so we can switch to the newer stamp as soon as it becomes available without a lot of unnecessary waste. We ask that you continue to use the stamps you currently have until they need to be replaced. If you would like to participate in any field testing of new stamp designs, please notify me via e-mail, indicating your location, and how many stamps you can use.

VEHICLES**Responsibilities as an Operator of a GSA Fleet Vehicle**

By Brian McNiff, Property Management Branch, ASD

Telephone: 301-504-4221

As the operator of a GSA Fleet vehicle, you are responsible for its proper use, maintenance, and protection. The GSA servicing Fleet Management Center that your vehicle is assigned to is your most important point of contact for all questions and problem areas. Abiding by the following procedures will help us keep costs down and provide the service you need.

Repair Service and Vehicle Maintenance

The Maintenance Control Centers (MCC) maintain complete computerized vehicle history records to maximize the serviceable life of your GSA vehicle. When unscheduled repairs are needed, contact the Maintenance Control Center at 1-888-622-6344 for authorization of repairs and determination of the most convenient and economical source for repairs or service. Notification of emergency repairs can be made to the MCC the next work day. When it is time for preventive maintenance, you are sent a Motor Vehicle Service Authorization advising you to have specific maintenance performed and the date the work is to be completed. This document serves as an authorization for the vendor to provide the services, up to \$100.00. You must contact the MCC for any purchases over \$100.00. It is the responsibility of every driver to have the required maintenance performed. Mechanical failure caused by failure to have the required maintenance performed is considered abuse and our agency is billed for the repairs.

Voyager Fleet Service Card

The General Services Administration (GSA) uses a commercial Fleet Services card for the fuel and minor maintenance and repair services required by the vehicle assigned you. The U.S. Government Fleet Services Card is provided by Voyager Fleet under the Smart Pay contract awarded to Citibank. Your servicing Fleet Center assigns a card to your vehicle and it should be used only for the vehicle assigned on the card. The Government Tag Number is printed on the front of the card.

Access Code. Each card is assigned a five-digit code that is the same as the last five numbers of the vehicle license plate. (Example: the access code for tag G12-12345 is 12345.) You will be prompted to enter the access code on the station's key pad for electronic purchases. You will also need to enter the vehicle odometer reading at the time of purchase.

Authorized non-fuel purchases. Vehicle operators can purchase oil, fluids, car washes and necessary maintenance and repair up to \$100.00 with the Fleet Services Card. You are not permitted to purchase replacement tires, batteries or glass with the Fleet Services Card. Our agency will be billed for all unauthorized purchases.

All maintenance and repair purchases totaling over \$100.00 require prior approval from the GSA Maintenance Control Center (MCC) at 1-888-622-6344. The MCC will review the repair history on the vehicle and authorize the work to be done. The hours of the MCC are 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM Central Standard Time.

In the event of an emergency that renders the vehicle unsafe to operate after normal hours, the driver is authorized to purchase repairs up to \$500.00. The driver must call the MCC the next work day to report the work that was done.

If your card is lost, stolen or damaged, call the servicing GSA Fleet Management Center as soon as possible. The card will be canceled and a new one mailed to you.

SAFETY

Forklifts and Pedestrians

*By Timothy Dial, EHSB, ASD
Telephone: 630 620-7474 ext. 228*

Stop, Look, And Listen -These are common words we heard as children. In the jobs that we perform today, these words should still echo in our minds as we walk through the establishments where forklifts are present. Since none of us are forklift operators, I would like to focus on us as pedestrians and talk about precautions that we can take to avoid accidents. We should always be aware of each other's presence. Always walk at a normal pace, and follow established traffic patterns. Remain alert at all times, and do not take short cuts or step out into blind spots.

As a pedestrian, don't stop and hold conversations in areas where forklifts are moving back and forth. Have your conversations in a non-forklift traffic area. Be alert and follow safe traffic routes.

Don't assume that forklifts are going to yield to you. In a noisy area you may not hear the sound of a forklift's horn as it backs out of a shipping dock, cooler, freezer or hallway. Even in areas that are not too noisy, you may not hear the sound of a horn (OSHA standards don't require them to have a horn, although it is safer to have one). These are some of the reasons why you should be alert at all times, and follow safe traffic routes at the establishment.

If you should experience a close miss with a forklift, before finding fault with the other party, try to find a way to resolve the problem so that it won't happen again. Remember that 31% of forklift accidents are with pedestrians, and 10% of all on-the-job disabling injuries are caused by forklifts. Both parties should respect the other's presence.

So remember, as mom and dad said when we where children, *STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN!* It could be the difference between life and death.

TRAVEL

Rule 240: Don't Leave Home Without It!

*By Dawn Ruffner, Budget Division
Telephone: 202-720-2210*

Rule 240 is your secret weapon for fighting airline delays, cancellations, and missed connections. Before airline deregulation in 1978, Rule 240 was literally a federal requirement. Nowadays, it's a term describing what individual airlines will do for late or stranded passengers. In fact, the major airlines have filed "conditions of carriage" with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), guaranteeing their respective Rule 240's.

If your flight is delayed or cancelled, or if you've missed your flight connection, these policies may give you free meal vouchers, hotel accommodations, phone calls, and other amenities. You may be booked on a substitute flight -- even on another airline -- and you may be compensated or given a full refund if the flight problems persist.

How can you use Rule 240 to protect your rights?

Always carry a printed copy of your airline's Rule 240. Though the DOT requires airlines to keep a Rule 240 copy available for passengers at every ticket counter, don't count on that.

Read Rule 240 carefully before you use it. Many airline ticket agents do not know these policies, so you should be the expert. For example, Rule 240's generally apply only to delays that are absolutely the airline's fault, such as mechanical delays. They do not apply to what the airlines call "force majeure" events: weather, strikes, "acts of God," or other occurrences that the airlines say they cannot control.

Be polite but very firm about your rights under Rule 240. You'll win most battles at ticket counters when you say the phrase "Rule 240" and show the agent your printed copy of the airline's policies. However, don't hesitate to keep going up the chain to supervisors if you're not satisfied. Sometimes, airlines will even go beyond Rule 240 requirements in the name of customer service. Not always, but it's worth a shot!

This article was published on the web site of Consumer Travel Rights Center (CTRC). CTRC is the largest web-based nonprofit organization in the United States dedicated to protecting the rights of traveling consumers. The author of this article is Al Anolik, Esq., president of Alexander Anolik, P.L.C., in San Francisco - the largest U.S. law firms specializing in the practice of travel law and travel industry litigation.

For a copy of an airline's official Rule 240, go to www.mytravelrights.com , and select this article. At the bottom of the article are links to the various airlines and their Rule 240.

Cash Advances Where Travel Charge Card Accounts Have Been Cancelled

The number of Government travel charge card accounts closed due to delinquency or abuse is on the rise. Bank of America has a non-reinstatement policy for all Government travel charge card holders. According to Departmental Regulation 2300-002, "Advance of Funds for Official Travel", when an account has been canceled for these causes, cash advances are limited to expenses that the traveler normally pays for by cash (i.e. meals and incidental expenses, and miscellaneous expenses).

The Government travel charge card is used to cover major expenses such as common carrier fares, lodging costs, and rental of automobiles. Cash advances may not be distributed to cover expenses that are normally paid for with the Government travel charge card. Therefore, travelers with cancelled Government travel charge card accounts may have to use personal funds to pay for these expenses. Common carrier transportation fares, however, may still be paid by the Government's transportation account.

ISSUANCES**Recent Agency Issuances**

*By Corinne Calhoun
Administrative Services Division*

Telephone: 301-504-4233

The following notices and directives have been issued since the July 2001 edition of the Beacon. Many recent issuances are available in an electronic format from the Lan Intranet server site (<\\Dchqoms1\fsisapps\pcdials\pcdials.htm>) and from the "Agency Issuances" public folder in the Exchange mail system (Outlook).

Notice 22-01 (6/29/01) *Procedures for FSIS Personnel During Pre-Implementation Period for "Retained Water in Raw Meat and Poultry Products; Poultry Chilling Requirements"*

Notice 23-01 (6/29/01) *Revision to the New Disposition Instructions for Avian Keratoacanthoma*

Notice 24-01 (6/29/01) *Diversity Recruitment Plan*

Notice 25-01 (7/11/01) *Mandatory Use of a Government-Contracted Travel Management Center*

Directive 1400.1 (7/18/01) *Release of Agency Records to External Entities*

Directive 1450.1, Revision 2 (7/9/01) *Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts*

Directive 4335.8 (6/29/01) *Interview Policy for GS 13 through 15 Positions*

Directives and notices are distributed automatically to applicable Agency employees and offices. Additional copies are available from:

USDA FSIS ASD PMS
MAILDROP 5241
5601 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE
BELTSVILLE MD 20705-5241
Telephone: 301-504-4242
Fax: 301-504-4277

JUNE-JULY RETIREMENTS

Douglas Brown, CSI, OFO, Nashville, AR, 7/1/01, 34 years
Barbara A. Carter, Sec. OA, OFO, Salem, OR, 6/29/01, 28 years
Martha A. Cartwright, FI, OFO, Norma, NJ, 7/3/01, 28 years
George R. Chapman, CSI, OFO, Clinton, OK, 6/30/01, 29 years
Peter W. DiMartino, SCO, OFO, Oak Park, MI, 6/30/01, 30 years
Charlie R. Fleming, FI, OFO, Corpus Christ, TX, 6/30/01, 35 years
Thomas F. Grube, FI, OFO, Pembina, ND, 7/3/01, 30 years
Dorothy A. Hoskins, FI, OFO, Huntsville, AR, 6/30/01, 25 years
Asa H. Jewell Jr., VMO, OFO, Ingram, TX, 6/30/01, 30 years
Charlie J. Malone, CSI, OFO, Albertville, AL, 6/29/01, 31 years
Frank R. Mariani, CSI, OFO, Buffalo, NY, 6/16/01, 34 years
Kenneth W. Marks, CSI, OFO, Anderson, CA, 7/2/01, 36 years
Edwin S. Martin, CSI, OFO, Philadelphia, PA, 6/30/01, 37 years
George O. Moore Jr., CSI, OFO, Greenbelt, MD, 6/30/01, 33 years
Judith Neibrief, SA, OPPDE, Washington, DC, 6/30/01, 25 years
Jerry A. Nelson, FI, OFO, Sioux City, SD, 6/30/01, 19 years
John W. Overstreet, SVMO, OFO, Dekalb, IL, 7/1/01, 30 years
Jessie R. Pierce, CSI, OFO, Valdosta, GA, 6/29/01, 33 years
Joseph N. Romano, SCO, OFO, Bogota, NJ, 6/30/01, 36 years
Kimberly A. Savage, FI, OFO, Garden City, KS, 7/14/01, 8 years
Clarence E. Scott, SVMO, OFO, Lenoir City, TN, 7/3/01, 27 years
William A. Scribner, CO, OFO, Albany, NY, 6/29/01, 28 years

Edward E. Stacer, CSI, OFO, Gannis, AR, 7/3/01, 21 years
Dorothy E. Stringfellow, DADA, OPPDE, Wash., DC, 6/20/01, 28 years
Gary D. Tews, CSI, OFO, Fremont, NE, 6/30/01, 30 years

LEAVE TRANSFER RECIPIENTS

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. <u>Annie Stewart</u>
HRFO, MN; Serious Illness | 20. <u>George Toups</u>
OFO, LA; Serious Illness | 39. <u>Roberta Snyder</u>
OFO, PA; Family Illness |
| 2. <u>Linda Cole</u>
OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness | 21. <u>Kelly Mitchell</u>
OFO, DC; Serious Illness | 40. <u>Valerie Sewell</u>
OM, DC; Maternity |
| 3. <u>Linda Carey</u>
EMS, DC; Surgery | 22. <u>Geraldine Woods</u>
OFO, TX; Surgery | 41. <u>Denise Carpenter</u>
OFO, CA; Maternity |
| 4. <u>Betty Morgan</u>
OFO, AR; Family Illness | 23. <u>Linda Kendrick</u>
OFO, AR; Surgery | 42. <u>Kimberly Bryant</u>
OFO, DC; Maternity |
| 5. <u>OFO-99-0027*</u>
OFO, NC, Surgery | 24. <u>Sandra Wasserman</u>
OM, MN; Serious Illness | 43. <u>Donivan Hudgins</u>
OFO, AR; Serious Illness |
| 6. <u>Tammy Love</u>
OFO, AR; Surgery | 25. <u>Steven Casey</u>
OFO, WA; Serious Illness | 44. <u>Arminture Adway</u>
OFO, TX; family Illness |
| 7. <u>Sue Engels</u>
OFO, IA; Family Illness | 26. <u>Melanie Norman</u>
OFO, TX; Serious Illness | 45. <u>Martha De La Rosa</u>
OFO, CA; Serious Illness |
| 8. <u>Aurbrey Tribble</u>
OFO, FL; Serious Illness | 27. <u>Annetta Turner</u>
OFO, DC; Surgery | 46. <u>OPHS-01-0001*</u>
OPHS, CA; Serious Illness |
| 9. <u>John French</u>
OFO, GA; Family Illness | 28. <u>Osmar Ponce</u>
FO, CA; Surgery | 47. <u>Estella Tucker</u>
OFO, LA; Maternity |
| 10. <u>Clement Grangier</u>
OFO, MD; Serious Illness | 29. <u>Marvin Miller</u>
OFO, NE; Surgery | 48. <u>Guadeloupe Solis</u>
OFO, CA; Maternity |
| 11. <u>OFO-00-0006*</u>
OFO, AL, Illness | 30. <u>Robert Vincenty</u>
OFO, PR; Illness | 49. <u>Nelson Demby</u>
OFO, MD; Surgery |
| 12. <u>Randy Haggard</u>
OFO, TX; Serious illness | 31. <u>Kathy Richmond</u>
OFO, LA, Serious Illness | 50. <u>Myrna Couch</u>
OM, IA; Surgery |
| 13. <u>OFO-00-0030*</u>
OFO, WV; Surgery | 32. <u>Wilda Barnes</u>
OFO, KY; Surgery | 51. <u>Lillian Hanford</u>
OFO, TN; Maternity |
| 14. <u>Barbara Males</u>
OFO, NY; Serious Illness | 33. <u>Patricia Rogers</u>
OFO, AR; Serious Illness | |
| 15. <u>Donald Palmer</u>
OFO, KS; Family Illness | 34. <u>Judy St. Clair</u>
OFO, KS, Illness | |
| 16. <u>Leslie Buzzell</u>
OFO, ME; Surgery | 35. <u>Lisa Cleveland</u>
OFO, GA; Maternity | |
| 17. <u>Margarita Fiol</u>
OFO, PR; Illness | 36. <u>OFO-01-0014*</u>
OFO, FL; Illness | |
| 18. <u>Lois Mullens</u>
OFO, AL; Serious Illness | 37. <u>Tonya L. Johnson</u>
OM, DC, Illness | |
| 19. <u>Janet O'Byrne</u> | 38. <u>Marla Grubb</u> | |

* While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers, if they choose, so that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

To comment on this newsletter or to submit an article for publication, please contact:

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USDA, FSIS, OM - Mail Drop 5230 - 5601 Sunnyside Avenue - Beltsville, MD 20705-5250
Tel: 301-504-4222 Fax: 301-504-4231
peter.bridgeman@usda.gov
or
fsis.servicebeacon@usda.gov

The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically in the "Newsletters" public folder on the Exchange (Outlook) mail system as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

Attachment 1

Thrift Savings Plan**C, F, G, S, I, Stock & Bond Index Fund Monthly Returns***Updated July 5, 2001*

Time Period	G Fund	F Fund	LBA Bond Index	C Fund	S&P 500 Stock Index	S Fund	Wilshire 4500 Stock Index	I Fund	EAFE Stock Index
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1996	6.76	3.66	3.63	22.85	22.96	18.52	17.18	6.27	6.14
1997	6.77	9.60	9.65	33.17	33.36	26.61	25.69	1.46	1.55
1998	5.74	8.70	8.69	28.44	28.58	7.51	8.63	20.46	20.09
1999	5.99	(.85)	(.82)	20.95	21.04	32.70	35.49	26.81	26.72
2000	6.42	11.67	11.63	(9.14)	(9.10)	(8.76)	(15.77)	(14.11)	(14.17)
2000	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
July	.53	.89	.91	(1.56)	(1.56)	(1.90)	(2.84)	(4.22)	(4.19)
Aug.	.52	1.46	1.45	6.19	6.21	11.60	11.16	.94	.87
Sept.	.49	.64	.63	(5.27)	(5.28)	(3.65)	(4.07)	(4.82)	(4.87)
Oct.	.51	.66	.66	(.40)	(.42)	(7.22)	(8.17)	(2.40)	(2.36)
Nov.	.48	1.65	1.64	(7.87)	(7.88)	(15.17)	(17.02)	(3.80)	(3.75)
Dec.	.48	1.86	1.86	.50	.49	7.57	6.33	3.46	3.55
2001									
Jan.	.46	1.65	1.63	3.55	3.55	4.67	5.44	(.07)	(.05)
Feb.	.42	.87	.87	(9.12)	(9.12)	(10.52)	(12.15)	(7.50)	(7.50)
March	.45	.51	.50	(6.33)	(6.34)	(8.42)	9.18	(6.62)	(6.67)
April	.43	(.42)	(.42)	7.78	7.77	10.52	10.58	7.03	6.95
May	.47	.61	.60	.65	.67	1.42	2.37	(4.13)	(3.53)
June	.47	.39	.38	(2.42)	(2.43)	.66	.81	(3.99)	(4.09)
Last 12 Months	5.86%	11.31%	11.23%	(14.80%)	(14.83%)	(13.59%)	(19.42%)	(24.00%)	(23.74%)

Percentages in () are negative.

The G Fund (Government Securities Investment Fund) is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities. The F Fund (Fixed Income Index Investment Fund) is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund, which tracks the Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate bond index. The C Fund (Common Stock Index Investment Fund) is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund, which tracks the S&P 500 stock index.

The S Fund (Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment Fund) is invested in the Barclays Extended Market Index Fund, which tracks the Wilshire 4500 stock index. The I Fund (International Stock Index Investment Fund) is invested in the Barclays EAFE Index Fund, which tracks the Europe, Australasia, and Far East (EAFE) stock index. The S and I Funds were implemented in May 2001. For the period before the implementation of these funds, the returns reflect the performance of the related Barclay's funds in which they are invested, without deduction of any administrative expenses, trading costs, or investment management fees.

The monthly returns of the TSP Funds represent net earnings for the month after deduction of accrued administrative expenses, and in the case of the F, C, S, and I Funds, after deduction of trading costs and accrued investment management fees as well. The returns for the four indexes shown do not include any deduction for administrative expenses, trading costs, or investment management fees.

Future performance of the five funds will vary and may be significantly different from the returns shown above. See the *Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan* for detailed information about the funds and their investment risks.

Attachment 2

ADDITIONAL INTERNET SITES ACCESSIBLE TO FAIM USERS

USDA Sites

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

National Organic Program
Farmers Markets
Dairy Programs
Food Purchases

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Eastern Regional Research Center
National Agricultural Library (NAL)

Animal And Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Animal Dealer Registration
Animal Health
Biotechnology
Traveler's Information

Center For Nutrition Policy And Promotion (CNPP)

Food Guide Pyramid and Dietary Guidelines

Cooperative State Research, Education And Extension Service (CSREES)

Small Farms Program

Research and Education Grants

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Food Assistance and Nutrition Research

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Farm Loans
Crop and Natural Disaster Assistance
Conservation Reserve Program

Food And Nutrition Service (FNS)

Food Stamp Program
Food Distribution Program
National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs
Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program
Community Food Security

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

Meat and Poultry Recalls
Consumer Education and Information

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

International Food Aid
Assistance for Exporters

Grain Inspection, Packers And Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

Federal Grain Inspection Service
Packers and Stockyards Programs

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Statistical Information and Reports
Census of Agriculture Data

Office Of Community Development (OCD)

Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC)
Rural Economic Action Program (REAP)

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Crop Insurance

Rural Business - Cooperative Services (RBS)

Assistance for Business Development

Rural Housing Service (RHS)

Housing Assistance

Rural Utilities Service (RUS)

Distance Learning/Telemedicine
Telecommunications

Attachment 2 (cont)

Other Government Web Sites

Centers For Disease Control - CDC serves as the national focus for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities designed to improve the health of the people of the United States.

Environmental Protection Agency - The mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment--air, water, and land--upon which life depends.

General Services Administration - GSA provides other federal agencies the workspace, products, services, technology, and policy they need to accomplish their missions.

Government Printing Office - Created primarily to satisfy the printing needs of Congress, GPO today is the focal point for printing, binding, and information dissemination for the entire Federal community

National Finance Center - NFC provides centralized, automated, integrated systems and support services for payroll, personnel, administrative payments, accounts receivable, property management, budget, and accounting activities.

Office Of Personnel Management - OPM provides governmentwide human resources development leadership and policy.

Employee Express - Employee Express is a Year 2000 compliant innovative automated system that empowers Federal employees to initiate the processing of their discretionary personnel-payroll transactions electronically.

USDA JOBS - The U.S. Government's official site for jobs and employment information provided by the United States Office of Personnel Management

Thrift Savings Plan - The TSP is a retirement savings plan for employees of the U.S. Federal Government.

Other Food-Related Sites

International HACCP Alliance -The International HACCP Alliance was developed to provide a uniform program to assure safer meat and poultry products.

Just Food - Just Food's mission is to help develop a just and sustainable food system in the New York City region by fostering understanding, communication and partnership among diverse groups concerned with farming, hunger and other issues related to food.

Meat News - Meat Processing News Online.

Other Resources

Federal Express - the world's largest express transportation company.

Mapquest.com - to provide travelers and customers access to mapping and driving directions.

Virginia.edu - University of Virginia

Virtuallythere.com - Up-to-the-minute itinerary and destination information.

Weather.com - The Weather Channel bringing timely weather information to the world.

Attachment 3

TRANSIT SUBSIDY UPDATE

Questions and Answers

The Department of Agriculture transit subsidy program has been in effect since October 1, 2000. As of July 1, records indicate there are currently 483 Headquarters participants, and 109 field participants.

In the National Capital Region, transit subsidies for eligible FSIS headquarters' employees are distributed on a quarterly basis at several locations: South Building, West End Court at 22nd and M Streets, N.W., Aerospace Building at 901 D Streets, S.W., and the Beltsville Facility at 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Beltsville, Maryland. Quarterly distribution schedules are published via Outlook in advance of actual distribution dates for these locations.

Transit subsidies for eligible FSIS field employees are distributed by mail to various locations around the country (primarily the District Offices of Alameda, California; Dallas, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota (District Office and HRFO); Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Financial Processing Center in Des Moines, Iowa.

Below are questions and answers pertaining to the FSIS transit subsidy program.

1-Which employees in FSIS are eligible to receive transit and vanpool benefits?

All employees in FSIS who use mass transportation or authorized vanpools to commute to and from work will receive a benefit in amounts equal to their commuting costs, not to exceed \$65 a month, in the form of a transit pass (such as Metrocheck), purchased by the Agency with appropriated funds.

2- What is a transit pass?

A transit pass is any pass, token, farecard, voucher or similar item entitling a person to transportation (or transportation at a reduced price) on 1) mass transit facilities (whether or not publicly owned) or 2) provided by any person in the business

of transporting persons for compensation or hire in a highway vehicle with a seating capacity of at least 6 adults (excluding the driver) as stipulated by Internal Revenue Service regulations.

3- What does "amounts equal to commuting costs" mean? Does the maximum benefit automatically apply if I commute to work by mass transportation or vanpool?

No, you are not entitled to the maximum benefit of \$65 a month automatically. Employees who take qualifying mass transportation or vanpools to commute to work will receive a transit pass or voucher in *the actual amount of the employees commuting costs* rounded to the nearest dollar. For example, if an employees actual commuting expense is \$50.40 per month, then the agency would provide him/her transit fare media worth \$50; if the cost were \$50.70, then fare media would be provided in the amount of \$51. Employees must certify as to the actual amount of their commuting costs on the Transit Benefit application form.

4- What forms of public transportation must an employee use in order to qualify for the transportation benefit?

The employee must use either bus, light rail, subway, train, ferry or other authorized commuter highway vehicle. A commuter highway vehicle is any vehicle with a seating capacity of at least 6 adults (not including the driver). At least 80 percent of the total mileage use of the vehicle must be reasonably expected to be for: 1) the purposes of transporting persons in connection with travel between their residence and their place of employment, and 2) during these commuting trips passengers will number, on average, at least 2 of the adult seating capacity (not including the driver).

Attachment 3 (cont.)

5- Does the transit pass program include vanpool benefits?

Yes, if the vanpool meets the definition of an authorized commuter highway vehicle defined in Question 4 above.

6- Are employees who carpool to commute to and from work eligible for the transit benefit?

Only if the vehicle meets the definition of a commuter highway vehicle mentioned in the answer to question 4 and is driven by a person in the business of transporting persons for compensation or hire referenced in Question 2. Also, a 7-passenger "carpool" driver/owner may need to form a partnership with the local transit authority and also be willing to accept transit vouchers as payment towards the commuting costs of its riders. Local transit authorities should be consulted in assessing whether a 7 passenger carpool would qualify as a vanpool. Usually, if you are choosing to carpool with others or drive yourself as your primary mode of transportation to commute to and from work, versus taking a form of mass transportation, you are not eligible for the transit benefit.

7-How often must an employee use public transportation in order to qualify for the transit benefit?

The employees use of the public transportation or van pool must be on a regular and recurring basis and must be the primary mode of transportation for his/her commute to work. Employees who regularly carpool or drive a car to commute to and from work and only use public transportation or vanpools to commute to work on an occasional basis are not eligible (e.g., have to work beyond carpool hours so drive in yourself, come in for meeting when rest of the carpool has its scheduled day off, car breaks down one day so you use public transportation, etc.) Transit Benefits programs under authorizing statutes are designed to improve air quality, reduce traffic congestion by getting more cars off the road, and conserve energy. For this reason, the laws governing transit benefits encourage employees to commute regularly by a form of mass transportation. If you choose your regular mode of transportation to be a carpool (by car), then you cannot get the transit benefit.

8-Will my vanpool accept a transit pass/voucher?

Most qualified vanpools (VSPI, etc.) partner with their local transit authority programs and will honor transit vouchers. In the National Capital Region (NCR), vanpools partner with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authorities (WMATAs) Metrocheck program. Vanpool drivers/owners can contact the local transit authority in their service area to make arrangements to partner with them in their local transit voucher program. DOT will be purchasing transit passes from the local transit authority in their service area for distribution to eligible employees.

9-What is a Metrocheck?

Metrocheck is the name of a farecard voucher that can be used in the NCR as a Metrorail farecard or voucher for local vanpools that is provided to qualified employees to cover the actual costs of their commuting on public transportation or vanpool up to a maximum of \$65 per month. Farecard vouchers may be in the form of any type metrochecks, metro passes, senior and disabled farecards, bus tokens, etc. You indicate on your application the fare media desired. The Metrocheck program may be under a different name in your specific metropolitan service area; however, your local transit authority will have a similar program. Most bus, rail and vanpool commuter services accept Metrochecks or a comparable voucher from the transit authority at your metropolitan location.

10-What are the tax consequences of my transportation fringe benefit (transit pass/farecard voucher)?

Transit and vanpool benefits not exceeding the statutory monthly limit of \$65 are not wages for the purpose of the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) and Federal income tax withholding.

Attachment 3 (cont.)

11-Can my Agency simply provide a transit or vanpool benefit, in cash, in the employees paycheck each month?

No, Federal agencies must purchase transit or vanpool passes or vouchers (where readily available) and distribute them directly to the participating employees. In large metropolitan areas where mass transit is prevalent, transit

passes/vouchers are usually readily available. DOT, who is administering the Transit pass/voucher program for USDA agencies including FSIS, will purchase appropriate passes/vouchers from your local transit authority based on the information provided in your application and distributed to employees approved for the benefit. Distribution in the NCR is accomplished quarterly. In field locations, distribution may be done monthly or quarterly depending on coordination between DOT and the local transit authority.

12-Can my agency provide parking benefits at transit facilities in connection with the Executive Order?

No, this is not mandated under the Executive Order 13150. Parking costs are treated separately from transit costs, even if they are incurred in conjunction with an employees commute by public transportation or vanpool. Agencies may elect to reimburse employees' parking costs for their qualified parking expenses at or near transit stations, park and ride lots, or vanpool staging areas (where parking fees are charged), using either appropriated funds in the form of a reimbursed subsidy or an employee non-taxable allowance up to a maximum of \$175.00 per month (employees may use part of their salary, tax free to pay their parking costs). In many agencies, employees are often asked to choose a parking or transit benefit but may not receive both. Parking benefits are being reviewed in conjunction with Departmental policy that is being developed and decisions will be made by FSIS at a later date on the availability of funds for this purpose.

13- Are temporary employees, employees reassigned temporarily to headquarters offices or to other field office locations where public transportation is available, and summer employees eligible for transit benefits?

Yes, temporary employees or employees reassigned temporarily to headquarters or to other field office locations, where they use public transportation or vanpool to commute to and from work, are eligible. Summer employees (interns, etc.), are eligible for the transit subsidy provided they are under paid appointments with USDA and as long as they use public transportation or vanpool to commute to and from work on a regular and continual basis. Summer employees who are hired and paid by other entities or not on the rolls of FSIS (e.g., DC Summer Youth, volunteers) are not eligible for the transit benefit program since eligibility is dependent upon being a Federal employee.

14-How do I find out about dates and locations for transit subsidy distribution?

A user notice goes out by e-mail to all FSIS headquarters employees on a quarterly basis. The notice provides dates, times and locations of metrocheck distributions and the names of transit coordinators. Although distributions are quarterly, the exact dates of the distribution are determined by the Department of Transportation and they provide the information to USDA once the decision has been made.

Distribution to field employees is by mail on a monthly or quarterly basis dependent upon coordination between DOT and the local transit authority in your field location.

15-Is there a chance that the subsidy will increase at a future date?

The maximum allowable subsidy is scheduled to increase to \$100.00 per month in January, 2002. However this maximum is mandated for the NCR only. Agencies will be permitted discretion on the amount of the subsidy for the field. Currently, FSIS provides an equal subsidy amount of \$65.00 per month for Headquarters and the Field.

(A copy of the Transit Benefit Application Form is provided in Attachment 4, for your convenience)

Attachment 4

Check Action

New: _____

Change: _____

Cancellation: _____

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION BENEFIT PROGRAM APPLICATION
 (Please type or print legibly in blue or black ink)

Faremedia
 returned and
 enclosed
 \$ _____

USDA Agency Code (For example: 02 for Agricultural Marketing Research): _____

A. Applicant Information:

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ MI: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Work Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Work Telephone Number: _____ SSN: _____

Prior to applying for this benefit, did you drive to work or use some form of mass transit? _____

B. Modes of Transportation to be used to and from workplace:

Please provide the name of the transit company/system that you use in the space below:

Bus _____ Light Rail _____ Subway _____ Train _____ Ferry _____

Authorized *Commuter Highway Vehicle (Van pool) _____ Other (explain) _____

*Any authorized vehicle with a seating capacity of at least 6 adults (not including the driver). At least 80 percent of the total mileage use of this vehicle can reasonably be expected to be for purposes of transporting persons in connection with travel between their residences and their place of employment. During these trips passengers will number at least ½ of the adult seating capacity (not including the driver).

Please provide the specific type of faremedia you use (e.g. ticket, pass, token, etc.): _____

C. Employee Certification:

WARNING: This certification concerns a matter with the jurisdiction of an agency of the United States and making a false, fictitious, or fraudulent certification may render the maker subject to criminal prosecution under title 18, United States Code, Section 1001, Civil Penalty Action, providing for administrative recoveries of up to \$10,000 per violation, and/or agency disciplinary actions up to and including dismissal.

I certify that I am employed by the Department of Agriculture.

I certify that I am eligible for a public transportation fare benefit, will use it for my daily commute to and from work, and will not give sell, or transfer it to anyone else.

I certify that I am not a member of a car pool.

I certify that the monthly transit benefit I am receiving does not exceed my monthly commuting costs.

I certify that in any given month, I will not use the Government-provided transit benefit in excess of the statutory limit.

If my commuting costs per month on public transit exceed the monthly statutory limit, then I will supplement those additional costs with my own funds rather than use a Government-provided transit benefit designated for use in a future month.

I certify that my usual monthly commuting costs exclusive of parking are: \$ _____ Agency Maximum Subsidy: _____

Employee Original Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

D. Transit Subsidy Coordinator:

Name: _____ Title: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT: This information is solicited under authority of Public Law 101-509. Furnishing the information on this form is voluntary, but failure to do so may result in disapproval of your request for a public transit fare benefit. The purpose of this information is to facilitate timely processing of your request, to ensure your eligibility, and to prevent misuse of the funds involved. This information will be matched with lists at other Federal agencies of Government-assigned parking to ensure consistency with mode of transportation checked. (Revised 2/28/01)